

Duxbury Clipper

SECTION
B

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Section B

A Journey Down Surplus Street PART III: GENERATIONS

In part two of our series we were introduced to a magnificent federal built by Benjamin Bosworth, and learned of the many uses this house has served over three centuries. We also discovered the beauty of the Major Thomas cape and the enterprises surrounding the property. Now as we journey down Surplus Street, stopping at a pristine white cape, we find a house with more than 180 years of continuous family ownership and a lineage still going strong there today. A pathway can be made of more than just dirt, gravel, and pavement. It can be filled with family genealogies, which once unearthed can inspire us to dig into our own past and the history of our ancestors.

Bradford Holmes House 32 Surplus Street

In 1820, Bradford Holmes, a block maker by trade, purchased from Ahira Wadsworth, a Duxbury merchant, a parcel of land on the north side of what is now known as Surplus Street. He paid \$200 for the 1 1/2 acres, which included a cart way right to the shore. We also know from property deeds

Bartlett. The couple would be blessed with many children. Their son Bathsheba was born in 1803, then Bradford in 1805, Betsey B. in 1807, George B. in 1809, Rufus B. in 1811, Julia in 1813, Ellis in 1816 and their last child, Henry in 1820. It seems incredible now to imagine so many people living in this quaint Cape on Surplus Street.

Misfortune hit home for

ter Julia would also pass away, leaving the young couple with five of their eight children.

Betsey and Bradford lived through these tragedies, finding other events to rejoice in such as the marriage of their daughter Betsey B. to Major Joseph Thomas. Thomas was a veteran of the Mexican War. Holmes purchased a lot not far from his property for the young couple to build their new home. He retained ownership of land, and Thomas built for his new bride a beautiful cape home now located at 14 Surplus Street.

Their son George B. would marry Caroline S. Soule in 1832, and young Rufus would marry a Winsor in 1847.

Tragedy befell the family again though in 1836 when Holmes' wife Betsy died. She was only thirty-four. Holmes remarried three years later to Nancy Houstings, who never had children with Bradford but raised Betsy's children as her own.

As Duxbury's shipbuilding industry began to decline, so too did Holmes' prosperity. The need for block makers dwindled, and Holmes found himself bankrupt. It may have been the end of Holmes' ownership in the property had his son Rufus not had the foresight and financial capabilities to help his father.

Holmes needed \$1500 and



(L-R): Clara Winsor Holmes, age 70; Clara Holmes Graves Cushman, age 45; and Ruby Graves, age 27. Photo taken in 1899.

Photo courtesy of Bea Richards

Rufus wanted to lend the money to his dad, but Bradford Holmes "insisted that was no way to do business, even with a parent, and gave a mortgage" to his son in return for the money, documented Ruby Graves, the granddaughter of Rufus.

Bradford and Nancy

ship in his parent's property.

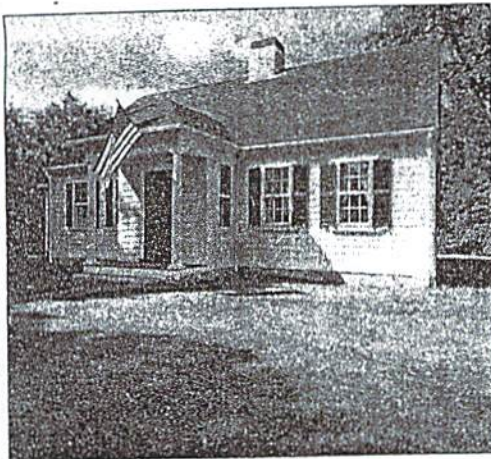
Rufus' stepmother, Nancy, received a dower of the easterly half of the main house, beginning at the front gate going through the house and out the easterly door of the back porch. She resided in her half of the house after her husband's death.

Rufus had worked as a cabin boy at about the age of sixteen, recalled Ruby Graves in 1958. He would spend much of his life at sea. His older brother, Bradford, became a blacksmith. He was not as capable or successful as Rufus and never married. Town records show Bradford living in the Almshouse, located not far from Surplus Street, in 1865.

In 1847, Rufus Holmes married Clara Winsor. He had been engaged to Clara's older sister but she had passed away before the wedding nuptials. So the young man waited for the younger sister, Clara, to "grow up" and married her when he was 36 and she was 18 years old, wrote Ruby Graves.

The couple had two children, Charles Winsor Holmes

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The Bradford Holmes House at 32 Surplus Street.

Photo by Michelle Rubin

that Holmes maintained a workshop on his property.

Holmes' story, however, begins even earlier when in 1802 he married Betsy

the couple, however, in 1814 when their eldest son Bathsheba died at age 11. Then they lost their baby Ellis before he reached his first birthday. In 1824 their daughter



Rufus Holmes

Photo courtesy of Bea Richards

remained in the house after this business arrangement with Rufus. When Bradford passed away in 1859 at the age of 83, Rufus took ownership of "all properties of the deceased" at auction for \$100. His bid along with the note for \$1500 secured his owner-

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A Journey Down Surplus Street: Part III

continued from page one

in 1848 and Clara born 1854.

According to Graves, Rufus and Clara first lived in a house at the corner of Washington and Stetson Street, and then moved to the family house on Surplus Street. When Rufus left for the West Coast, Clara moved back with her parents who lived just down the road on the corner of Winsor and Washington Street.

Rufus' career at sea did prove exciting when in 1856, his ship was wrecked on Pitcairn Island. Upon his arrival on the island, he quickly befriended the natives living there.

"The natives were laboriously making a bark cloth called tapa, (and) were using crude wood rollers that were not durable, so Grandfather took pieces of iron from the wrecked ship and made them into rollers to make their work easier," described Graves.

The natives were so pleased with their new iron

to join their enterprise. Sampson kept a diary of their days at Port Angeles and wrote to his father back in Duxbury of how he "had bought in" with Holmes and Winsor and they had their claims in what was to become Port Angeles. "Sampson's father puzzled over the letter, uncertain whether the locale was British or American."

Rufus finally returned to Duxbury in 1865. He had been away from his family for ten years. Clara and Rufus moved back to Surplus Street with their two children, Charles and Clara who were now 17 and 11 years old.

At some point in the 1800s, Rufus allowed the town to build a firehouse for their steam engine on part of his property near where the Stetson House is located on Bumblebee Lane today. The second floor of the firehouse was used as a dance hall.

"When a new fire house was built, near the Blue Fish River, Holmes had the old firehouse moved to his house

when only two years into this marriage, Clara was greeted by Martin Hanigan, a brakeman, who had run from the train station on South Station Street to report her husband Nahum had been hurt after falling from the train at the station.

"Almost immediately he returned to Clara to say he was dead," recalled Ruby Graves.

Clara never married again, raising Ruby on her own in the house on Surplus Street. Her brother, Charles or "Uncle Charles" as he became known to many in Duxbury, would live nearby on Washington Street where he boarded at Clara Wadman's house, recalled Bea Richards, a long time resident of Surplus Street who lives across from the Bradford Holmes House.

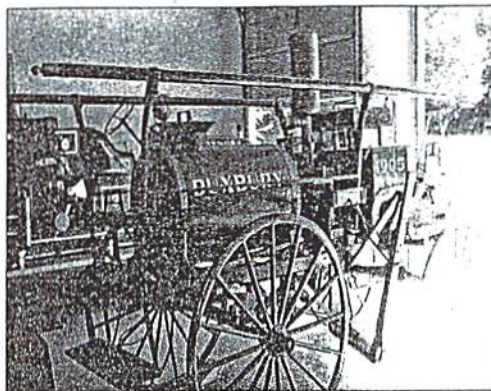
He was considered a real gentleman by the townspeople. His obituary in 1940, was entitled, "Duxbury's tribute to one of its grand old men." He lived a long life, and even towards the end of his years, "one could scarcely realize that he had reached the age of nearly 100 years, for his conversation was as bright and cheerful as when we knew him many years ago," wrote Annie D. Dunham.

Ruby Graves learned a great deal from Uncle Charles. He would be the one to teach Graves how to care for the Cape home her great-grandfather had built for his family.

"She learned from Uncle Charles a set routine of taking care of the house, like one year having the roof checked and the next year having the chimney bricks pointed up," said Bea Richards.

His niece Ruby also became a Duxbury icon of sorts. "She was loved by the entire town, and there is even a room named after her at the Unitarian Church...she was a very good person" noted Barbara Jameson Lawson.

During Lawson's childhood she spent her summers in a house just across the street from Ruby's on Surplus Street. She recalled her daily



A steam fire engine dating to 1905, currently stored at the Duxbury Fire Station.

Photo by Debora Katz

visits to "Miss Ruby," as she fondly called her, as precious moments in her life.

"Miss Ruby would let me play her metal gramophone - an instrument that held me spellbound," added Lawson.

"Ruby was very much a lady and never said a bad thing about anyone," recalled Bea Richards.

Both Lawson and Richards talked of Graves' love of cooking, especially in her summer kitchen, which was attached to the barn at the rear of the house on Surplus Street. Here she baked many delicious items for the Unitarian Fair, which was always a "highlight of the summer," said Lawson.

Ruby Graves as a young woman worked in Boston and met a man she planned to marry. "Her mother Clara did not approve of the man, and so the marriage never happened," said Richards.

Ruby never married and remained living in the house on Surplus Street. A beautiful old photo shows Ruby with her mother Clara and Grandmother Clara Winsor Holmes.

While Ruby never had children of her own, she loved and was adored by more children in town, and so it could be said she was a mother to many. The neighborhood children visited Miss Ruby at her home on Surplus Street often. It was not uncommon for Ruby to take walks with them through the pastures and woods that surrounded her

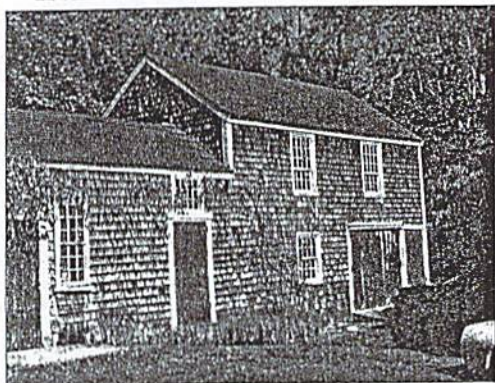
home, and as they walked she told them exciting stories of her grandfather Rufus life at sea, or pointed out "fascinating facts about the birds and flowers" they came upon.

"My sons would walk home from Sunday school each week and stop at Miss Ruby's to read the funny pages in her paper. They were always allowed to do this as long as they put back the paper exactly as it had been...and they always did," remarked Richards.

One story which Miss Ruby always liked to tell was how she and her housekeeper, Mildred Fralic found cases of preserved rum cherries which her mother had stored at least twenty years earlier in the attic of the house on Surplus Street. The two women didn't dare eat them but instead threw them out in back of the barn. Graves would then add with such excitement "then we had the happiest dogs in the neighborhood!"

It was important to Graves to have her house remain in the family. Upon her death in 1974 at the age of 101 years, she left the Surplus property to a distant cousin living in Plymouth. Today that cousin's son resides in and maintains the house of many generations.

Next in our series we will visit three houses all built by a family who represented the seafaring class of the 1800s as we journey down one of Duxbury's oldest pathways.



The attached barn was once a fire house and dance hall. It was moved to the Bradford Holmes House in 1877.

Photo by Debora Katz

rollers they gave Rufus a gift of two silver leg bracelets.

"When Grandfather returned to Duxbury he had those 'heathen ornaments' fashioned into two teaspoons marked RHC for Rufus and Clara Holmes," she added.

This Duxbury native, Rufus Holmes, would later be recognized as the first settler of Port Angeles, Washington.

He would remain at Port Angeles, purchasing a schooner, the J.K. Thorndyke, and setting up a homestead with his childhood friend, William W. Winsor. Both Holmes and Winsor were reportedly over six feet tall, a fact unusual enough to document back then. They had decided to start a trading business shipping fresh halibut to San Francisco and establishing a trade with the Native Americans for goods such as fur, fish and oil.

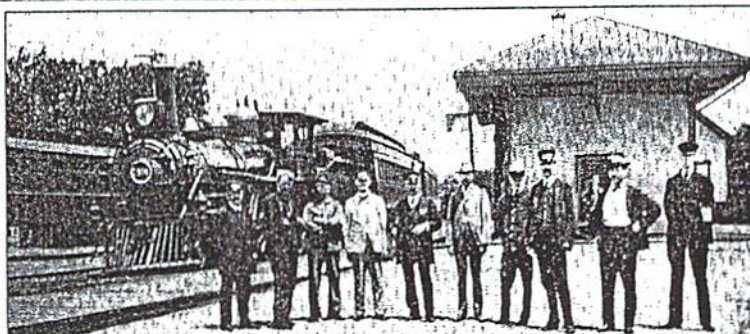
In 1859, the two men invited another Duxbury native,

for a barn where he kept a horse and two cows," noted Graves who was five years old when the firehouse was moved. (see photo)

Her grandfather, Rufus Holmes spent his latter years in Duxbury working for a "good friend" Captain D. Winsor.

Generation after generation continued to live in this lovely Cape home on Surplus Street. Rufus and Clara's daughter married Frank Graves. The couple had a daughter named Ruby who was born on September 7th, 1872. Tragedy struck this family when two years later Frank Graves died at the young age of 23. Clara Holmes became a widow with a small child at the age of twenty.

She would later fall in love with Nahum Cushman, and in 1885 marry him. Cushman was a "very kind step-father to me," wrote Ruby Graves in



The South Duxbury Station on South Station Street (c.1900) was the site of Nahum Cushman's accl-

A Journey Down Surplus Street

By DEBORA BABIN KATZ

PART IV: THE SEAFARERS

As we continue our journey down Surplus Street, we arrive at three houses all built by Brewsters. This family represents the seafaring class of the 1800s. Their well-built Cape Cod homes with hand hewn timber frames are historical treasures and a legacy of this pathway once known only as "the road" or "way to the Meeting House". A pathway can produce more than just dustbowl. It can contribute to the success of its residents and those who travel along its well-worn tracks. Every foundation, beam and peg found along its way could tell a tale — the tale of an ancient cart path, its people and the enterprises that sustained them.

Joseph Brewster House 23 Surplus Street

This charming, restored cape style home returns us to the days of shipbuilding. Joseph Brewster, a prosperous shipwright, built his house some time between 1802 and 1808. He built it for his wife, Sara Hunt whom he married on December 28th, 1802. Brewster bought the lot for \$80 from his father-in-law Lot Hunt whose farm abutted part of the property.

It is interesting to note how the house sits facing the east unlike most of the other homes, which faced onto Surplus Street. It is possible the house faced this direction onto a lane, which would have led to his father-in-law Lot Hunt's farm and homestead.

Brewster's ability to increase his land holdings is an indication he was successful in his profession as a shipbuilder. His skills also show in the construction of his lovely cape home. In 1838, Brewster increased his property by buying some neighboring land from his father-in-law. The same year he also bought a piece of bay-side property previously owned by Nathaniel Cushing.

Along with his prosperity came a large family -- a total of ten children who all grew up in the cape home. During the time the house was built, Joseph and Sara had three children, Eunice born in 1804, Joseph born 1805, and Samuel who was born in 1807. Two years later, Emerson came, then the twins, Sara and Nancy, were born on July 21st 1810. William was born in 1812, Asa on December 18, 1815, Jane two years later and then a second Eunice in 1818.

Not surprisingly, the original keeping room housed a large double oven fireplace with a 46-by-24 inch wide stove and another 10-by-24 inch stove used to cook the many meals Sara Hunt Brewster would have needed to feed her ten children and husband.

The Brewsters were a close knit family. Their oldest son, Joseph Jr. built his



house in 1828 not far from the family homestead on part of the family's land, and Asa, a younger brother, bought land and built a home across from his parent's place on Surplus Street.

Around 1833, a large two-story barn was "melded to the Cape." A more recent renovation of this space now provides a new large kitchen and second floor bedroom. The privy was moved to the east-side of the barn addition and converted into a bath and laundry room. "Old hand hewn beams and joining pegs are visible in this section of the house," noted Ann and Kevin Mullins, the current owners of the Joseph Brewster House.

In April 1847, after the death of Joseph Brewster senior at age 68 years old, Joseph Brewster Jr. obtained ownership of his house which had been built on part of his parents homestead along with 60 rods of land after paying his siblings \$450. In the previous month, Joseph had accepted \$500 from Asa and his sisters for his share in his father's estate. His younger sister Sara continued to live in the house with her daughter Eunice until 1856.

For 66 years the house remained in the Brewster family until 1868 when Joseph Jr. sold it for \$800 to the Reverend Bartholomew Otheman and his wife Abbie.

Fortunately many of the home's original treasures remain. Wide pine floors, some 14 inches wide, are found throughout the traditional center entrance. The original fireplaces, wainscoting, windows, Christian paneled doors along with a "bournig room and small closet on the south side of the house remain unchanged," added Mullins.



The Joseph Brewster House owned by Ann and Kevin Mullins who appropriately named their dog Brewster. PHOTO BY MICHELLE BABIN

Asa & Lydia Brewster House 26 Surplus Street

Jonathan Gross, a coffin maker living in the Major Thomas house, now 14 Surplus Street, sold a parcel of his land to Asa and Lydia Drew Brewster on March 14, 1853.

Town Historian. Asa was most likely lured to the sea by his father the shipwright, as many young men in town were during this time period.

As Duxbury men looked to the sea as a way to provide for their families, the shipbuilding, fishing and the trade

roads to the shipyards," noted Pillsbury.

The peak of Duxbury's shipping industry was from 1820 to 1840, and the town "was thoroughly given to the sea and related industries," said Dorothy Wentworth.

One can gain a better glimpse into this seafaring world from records maintained during those two decades. According to the County Atlas of 1839 for example, there were 46 vessels employed in the cod and mackerel fishery in Duxbury in 1837. The value of codfish and mackerel for the year was \$55,548 of codfish and \$14,000 of mackerel. The number of vessels built that same year was 71 and their total value given was \$845,240 with a total of 897 men employed.

Asa must have done well for himself as a fisherman based on the fact he was able to buy his own land and build a beautiful Greek Revival with lovely columns supporting the front porch. Unlike his parents, Joseph and Sara Hunt Brewster, he and his wife Lydia were not able to fill their house with many children. Tragedy struck in 1857 when the couple's only son, George, died of scarlet fever at the age of 16.

Lydia and Asa remained in their beautiful Greek Revival home for the rest of their lives. In a 1859 Report of the Selectmen, their house was assessed for \$1,100 which was one of the highest in the district at that time.

Asa died in 1874 at the age of 59 and Lydia passed on in June of 1887. Her death marked the end of Brewster



(Above): The Asa and Lydia Brewster House today. (Below): The Brewster House in 1935.

PHOTO BY DEBORA BABIN KATZ

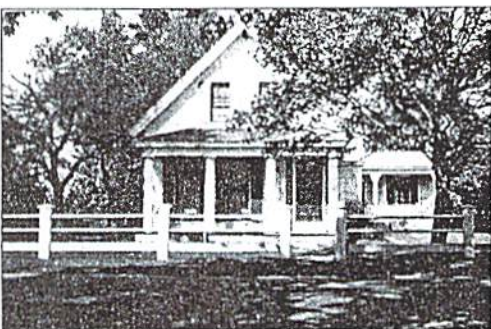


PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID COREY

Asa was the 8th child of Joseph and Sara Brewster who lived directly across from the property. Like his older brother, Joseph Jr., he was a fisherman by trade. "In Duxbury fishing, like farming, was a family business," wrote Katherine Pillsbury, the

industries prospered -- shaping the town, its activities, and its pathways.

"Transportation patterns began changing. The old west-to-east cart paths which the farmers had taken to the salt marshes now became

ownership in the house and its association with a seafarer family.

The house was then sold to William James Alden Jr. or Willy as he was known in Duxbury. "He had grown up just across the street at 33 Surplus Street," noted David Corey the current owner of the Asa and Lydia Brewster House.

Alden was born in 1845, and was single and 42 years old when he purchased the house. When his mother Lydia Woodward died in 1892, Alden decided it was time to settle down and get married.

"He got himself a mail-order bride, Maria Jones of Waltham," said Corey. The

Joseph Brewster Jr. House 47 Surplus Street

In 1828, at age 23, Joseph Brewster, Jr. married Almira Barker. His father Joseph Brewster provided a piece of the family land along Surplus Street so the couple could build their own home as they were expecting their first child. There is no deed for this transaction, only a family agreement, which was common practice in those days.

Joseph Jr. built a compact Cape similar to his parent's house, but he faced it to the street instead, said Bea Richards.

Richards purchased the Joseph Jr. House in 1943 with her husband Pete, the director of Clapp Laboratories located



Bea Richards in the original keeping room of the Joseph Brewster, Jr. House.



The Joseph Brewster, Jr. House built in 1828. PHOTO BY MICHELLE BADIN

couple had one son, Fredrick Jones Alden.

About the time that Willy Alden got married, his father, William James Alden, who was living just across the street, decided to sell his house and move in with the couple. Both Alden and his father were shoemakers and his Dad moved his small shop off the property at 33 Surplus Street and onto the back of Willy's yard, noted Corey.

Part of the original front yard fence contains an interesting reminder of their family business. "There is a section of the fence that lifts out and was wide enough for a cart to be wheeled through and up to the back of the house to pick up the finished shoes they made," said Corey, who kept the hidden treasure during renovations of the fence.

The Alden family remained in the house until 1934 when Frederick Jones Alden sold it on his mother's behalf.

a short distance away along Washington Street which is now Batelle Labs.

Joseph Jr. and Almira raised three sons, Henry, Joseph III, and Wilbur, and each one was born in the Joseph Brewster Jr. house.

When the cape was first built it had a small ell off the back, which was later replaced with a larger ell during a 1920s renovation, said Richards.

The unusual thing about this house is the location of the original kitchen. It is not located in the center or back of the home but rather on the side, noted Richards. This keeping room with large fireplace and remnants of a beehive stove was shortened during renovations in order to change the front stairwell. Molding has been added to one side of the hearth area to hide the old bricks. The ceiling of the keeping room reveals rows of beautiful beams and at the ceiling corners one can still see the original wood pegs jutting out.

obtained title to his house and land after his father's death in 1847 when he paid his siblings \$450 for ownership in the property.

In 1848, Joseph Brewster Jr., along with his siblings, sold some land next to Joseph's house to the town for the purpose of a schoolhouse. This became known as the Village School, which served the area's children and operated from 1848 to 1884. The site of the school was on property currently owned by the Cutler family, but the building itself was moved to what is now Western Way.

Life continued on for this seafaring, hard working family. Joseph and Almira's boys all grew up and moved away. Then in 1867, Almira died of pneumonia, at the age of 63. Joseph Jr. remained in the house he had built for his family for another two years before deciding to sell the property to George Curtis for \$900.

Curtis sold the house for \$1100 the following year to the Methodist Church for a

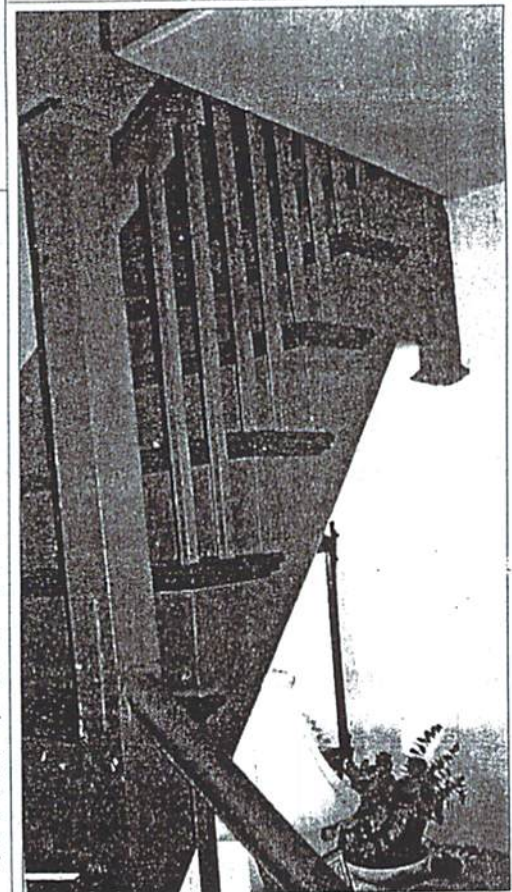
parsonage.

"For 15 years, from 1870 to 1885, the house served as a home for the ministers of the Methodist Church farther along Washington Street," said Richards. This church is now known as the Pilgrim Congregational Church.

Eventually misfortune met with this Brewster family. Their son Joseph III ended up living in the poor house for about three years. Joseph Jr., his father, went to live with one of his other sons in Rockland in 1887, where he died the same year at age 82 by "hanging by his own hands," noted Richards.

Joseph Brewster, Jr. had been born into a shipwright family- the sea was his life's work, his way of providing for his sons and wife. His story ends tragically, but his well-constructed cape cod home on Surplus Street remains forever a symbol of a hardworking, seafaring man, and is a tribute to the woman he built it for in 1828, the love of his life, Almira.

Next in our series, we will visit a unique historical house and discover how the town survived the decline of the shipbuilding industry through the ingenuity of its residents.



Hinge on main post of this stairwell inside the Joseph Brewster, Jr. House was installed to enable furniture to fit up the stairs.

PHOTO BY DEBRA KATZ